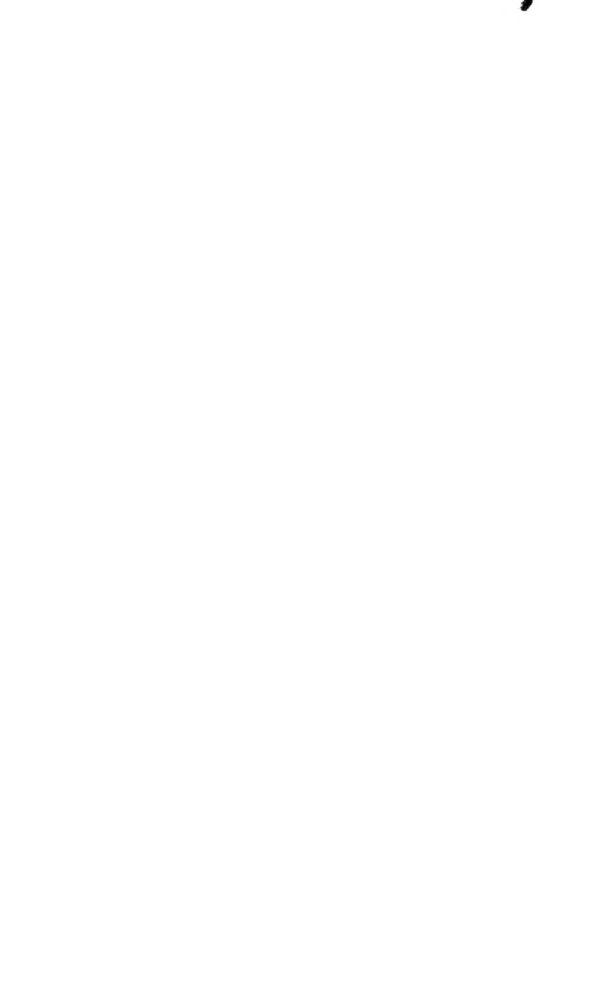


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AN ADDRESS
TO
CANDIDATES FOR THE MINISTRY,
ON THE
IMPORTANCE OF AIMING AT
EMINENT PIETY
IN MAKING THEIR PREPARATION FOR THE
SACRED OFFICE.



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ADDRESS.

WHETHER an unconverted Minister may be the instrument of the conversion of others, is a question which has sometimes been agitated; but although the answer should be in the affirmative, yet it can afford very slender ground of consolation to one who has assumed the office of the Gospel Ministry, without possessing genuine piety. To be the instrument of bringing others to heaven, and yet to be cast down to hell ourselves, is, surely, one of the most appalling considerations which can possibly be presented to the human mind. A sovereign God may, indeed, employ any instrument he pleases for the conversion of sinners; but it would be unreasonable to expect, that, commonly, he would make use of unsanctified men in this holy work. A greater calamity to the Church could not easily be conceived, than the introduction of a multitude of unregenerate men into the sacred Ministry; for, such as is the Ministry, such will be the people. Such men will ever be disposed to corrupt the simplicity and purity

of the Gospel, which the carnal mind cannot love; and even if they should preach the true doctrines of the Bible, their own hearts can never be in accordance with them; and although their words may be the truth of God, yet its good tendency will be counteracted by their proud and earthly spirit. Besides, it cannot be expected that the Holy Spirit will usually accompany with his sanctifying influences the labours of men, who, even when they preach the word of God, are not actuated by a desire to promote the glory of God, or to rescue men from the ruins of sin, but are all the time seeking their own glory, or aiming at their own emolument.

That genuine piety is an essential characteristic of a preacher of the Gospel, all men seem now to admit; for all are shocked when they observe a wicked life in one who ministers in holy things. Piety is expected as a matter of course in all those who have it as their official duty to inculcate piety; and even the profane despise the wretch who dishonours his sacred calling by a course of conduct at variance with the holy precepts of the Gospel. However men of the world may be gratified to find Ministers coming down to their own level, and however they may enjoy the company and lively wit of an ambassador of Christ; yet, in their sober judgment they cannot but perceive the glaring incongruity between his character and profession; and none, except the most hardened in iniquity, would be contented to have such a man for their spiritual guide. In extreme distress and mortal sickness, none would send for such a one to comfort them; but then they wish—if they

desire any religious conversation—that the most godly Minister be brought them. In our Church, the possession of true religion has been considered a matter of so much importance in the ministry, that she permits no candidate to be taken on trial by any Presbytery, until, by a free and full conversation on experimental religion, he satisfies them that he has more than the name or form of godliness; and that he has, as far as human judgment can determine, experienced in his own soul, that blessed change, which is called the new birth. And it is a matter of vital interest to the prosperity of the Church, that this salutary provision of our fathers be not suffered to degenerate into a mere formality. If the time should come—which may God avert!—when vital piety shall not be deemed an essential pre-requisite to an entrance on the sacred office, *Ichabod* may be written on our Church, for the glory will have departed from her. Whether, *now*, this duty is performed by Presbyteries, with as much fidelity as its importance demands, I shall not take it upon me to determine; but it cannot be amiss to submit it to their consideration, in the form of an inquiry. In some Presbyteries, the salutary practice of conversing freely and frequently with candidates during the period of their continuance on trial, has been introduced, and is calculated to produce the happiest effects. It cannot for a moment be supposed, that such a continued scrutiny would be ungrateful to the feelings of pious young men. They are often involved in perplexing difficulties in relation to their call to the Ministry; and most commonly their difficulties arise from doubts re-

specting the genuineness of their religious experience. To such it would often be of incalculable importance to be permitted freely to expose their exercises to the view of experienced Ministers of the Gospel, that they might enjoy the benefit of their counsels.

But my object in addressing you at present, my young friends, is not to insist on the necessity and importance of genuine piety in the sacred office, but to offer some considerations to show the advantages of EMINENT PIETY to the right and successful discharge of the duties of the ministry.

I. The first remark which I would make on this subject is, that without some degree of eminence in our piety, it is scarcely possible, that we should possess satisfactory evidence of its reality. And this results from the very nature of the evidence which we must possess, in order to be satisfied, on solid grounds, respecting the goodness of our spiritual state. A man can in no other way know that he is renewed, and in the favour of God, but by the exercise of faith, repentance, love to God and his people, humility, meekness, submission, &c. but the certainty, that we do repent, believe, and love God and the children of God, must depend on the strength and constancy of these exercises; therefore, they alone who have attained to some eminence in piety will possess that assurance, which is so desirable to every Christian, but especially important to the Minister of the Gospel. When the principle of piety is feeble, the remaining corruption of nature will be proportionally strong, and, consequently,

it will be exceedingly difficult to ascertain whether this weak faith, encompassed by so many infirmities, is indeed a saving faith. This difficulty is increased by the consideration, that there are counterfeits of piety so imposing, that, if it were possible, they would deceive the very elect. Some, indeed, will be disposed to allege, that the witness of the Spirit is sufficient to furnish undoubted evidence of our being the children of God, even if our exercises of faith and love be very feeble. I have no doubt that the Spirit does often give his decisive testimony to the fact that a person is passed from death unto life; but it may well be doubted whether the witness of the Spirit is ever given independently of the actual exercises of piety. It seems to me much safer, and more reasonable, to believe, that this testimony is afforded by calling into lively exercise the graces of the Holy Spirit; and, although it is true, that the Holy Spirit does shine upon his own work in the heart, and enable the pious soul to see clearly that its past views and exercises were of a truly spiritual and evangelical kind; yet, it is reasonable to think, that when these satisfactory views of past experience are enjoyed, the present state and exercises of the mind are more than usually elevated. When we are in darkness, and our faith is feeble, we are unable to recognise the character even of those holy affections, which, at the time, appeared most clearly to be the fruit of the Spirit; but it is a matter of common experience with the exercised Christian, that when he has a renewal of these pious emotions, he can look back and clearly discern the nature of similar exercises which were

formerly enjoyed. But conceding that the Holy Spirit may produce in us immediately, a joyful persuasion that we are the children of God—and I do not deny that this may be the fact—to whom is it most probable that this favour will be granted? To him whose pious affections are lively and vigorous, or to him who is weak in the faith, and dull and irregular in all the exercises of religion? Undoubtedly to the former. It is not God's method of dealing with his children, to encourage sloth and unfaithfulness, by connecting assurance with a low state of piety; but this is the gracious reward of the watchful, diligent, persevering believer. When the exercise of piety is low, anxious fear is made to operate on the sluggish mind. And if there are cases which seem to be repugnant to the statement here given, they may, nevertheless, be reconciled with it; especially, when it is considered, how incapable we are of ascertaining the real spiritual state of others. In order to this, it would be necessary that we should see the person in his private devotions; yea, that we should be able to examine the daily feelings of his heart. Some persons who are truly and ardently pious, and who hold much communion with God and their own hearts in private, do not exhibit to others as much appearance of lively piety as many others, who, in fact, are greatly inferior to them. This is sometimes owing to a constitutional reserve and diffidence, or to a natural buoyancy of spirit, which, when the person is in company, has the appearance of levity. And again, it ought to be considered, that as none are more confident of their good estate than deluded souls,

many of those who seem to maintain assurance without much appearance of elevated piety, may belong to this class. In general it will be found, that a rational scriptural assurance is the result of much self-examination, reading the Scriptures, and prayer, and that those who enjoy this delightful persuasion habitually, are persons in whom genuine piety has been assiduously cultivated, and has acquired deep root, and is in a healthy, vigorous state. If, then, you would gain a comfortable assurance of being the children of God, you must aim at a high standard of piety.

II. Eminent piety is not only necessary to the peace and personal comfort of the Minister of the Gospel, but it is requisite to prepare him for the faithful, diligent, and successful discharge of the duties of his office. Pastoral duties are often exceedingly difficult to be performed. They require so much self-denial, so much benevolence and compassion, and so much spiritual wisdom, that it may be calculated on as a matter of certainty, that they will be neglected, or carelessly performed, unless the Minister be actuated by deep and strong feelings of piety. It requires an habitual impression of divine things, and a continual sense of the responsibility of our office, to keep up our minds to that lively tone of feeling which is necessary to lead us forward in our work with alacrity, energy, and perseverance. The temptations to indolence and self-indulgence, are so powerful from without and from within, that you will undoubtedly grow remiss, unless you are sustained by more than common

piety. Some will, for want of this, be led away by the spirit of the world around them, and will be satisfied with such attainments as the low state of piety in their people demands. They sink down to the level of the Church, which they serve, instead of endeavouring to raise the standard of piety among those committed to their charge. Others become discouraged at the apparent want of success from their labours, and nothing more effectually cuts the nerves of effort than despondency. Such Ministers may be thought very pious, because they are low-spirited, and indulge gloomy anticipations; but there are few things more inimical to lively piety and to ministerial fidelity, than this moping, desponding temper. Few things have a greater tendency to harden the heart, and to render the man reckless of consequences, than this discouraged state of mind. The talents of such Ministers are permitted to rust for want of exercise, and all their efforts are slow and feeble. Others again will engage with ardour in literary pursuits, and while they are gratifying a mere natural thirst for knowledge, or a vicious ambition of pre-eminence, persuade themselves that they are occupied with the labours of their high vocation. Many pastors neglect the spiritual welfare of their people upon pretence of study, when, if their literary pursuits were impartially examined, they would be found to have little or no connexion with their great work; yet these are more respectable and more useful, than the class of indolent loungers, who are seldom in their studies, and who have the temerity to serve God in his sanctuary with crude,

undigested discourses, which cost them no labour in the preparation. Now, the remedy for all these evils, and scores of others, is the possession of higher degrees of religion. This will make the indolent man, industrious; the careless man, serious; the ambitious, humble. This will induce the servant of the Lord to watch for souls as one that must give an account. Who, except the man who has his heart touched with a tender compassion for perishing souls, will sufficiently exert himself to rescue them from ruin? The Minister of Christ should be ever on the watch for favourable opportunities of winning souls. He is a fisher of men, and must study the arts of drawing them into the Gospel net; accommodating himself to the tempers, conditions, and circumstances of all, that he may win some. Many of the duties of the pastor are of such a nature, that nothing but the warm feelings of piety will lead him to the regular performance of them; and, indeed, if they should be performed from other motives, it would be in such a manner as would be productive of no good. Love to God and to the souls of men, is the very principle which gives activity to the faithful Minister. This leads him to patient perseverance in sowing the seed of the Word; this makes him apt to teach, and willing to condescend to men of low estate, to give them the needed instruction. Under this influence the spiritual physician will be found in the hovels of the poor, at the beds of the sick, and in the house of mourning; but there is no other principle strong enough or pure enough, to lead to the faithful discharge of such duties; and that it be efficient, it must be kept

in a lively, growing state. But eminent piety is not only important for the discharge of the more private duties of the pastoral office, but also for the composition and delivery of sermons. Preaching is the noblest and most useful institution among men. It is God's great means of saving sinners, and edifying his own people: but in order to answer the end for which it was designed, the preaching of the Gospel must be rightly performed. Many things, it is true, are requisite to make a truly good preacher; but after all other qualifications have been mentioned, and duly appreciated, it will be found, that, unless eminent piety is superadded to them all, there will be a great, and indeed, an essential defect. The true spirit of preaching cannot be described in words, but it can be perceived and felt; and this spirit is nothing else but the manifestation of those emotions and desires of the heart in which genuine piety consists. The pious man speaks from the heart; and there is a mysterious sympathy between the soul of the speaker and those of his hearers. Men need no instruction to enable them to understand the language of genuine feeling, and where that feeling is the exercise of the pure love of God, and humble penitence, it reaches the heart of the attentive hearer, and communicates by sympathy something of its nature, so far as there exists any susceptibility of a kindred emotion. If sermons were always composed under the influence of pious sentiments, they would never be those cold, formal, lifeless things which we often find them to be. And it is one of the strongest arguments in favour of extempore preaching,

that the speaker is more likely to feel the truth which he utters, than when he sits down to write in his study. But this is not always the fact, for the extempore preacher may fall, and often does fall, into a round of commonplace ideas, or mere generalities, by which he is in no degree affected himself; and which, however he may exert his voice, and assume the appearance of earnestness, never can affect the intelligent hearer. The true remedy, and the only remedy, against cold, formal, and uninteresting written sermons, and against unmeaning and unimpressive extempore harangues, is the possession of lively feelings of piety when the Minister sits down to compose, or when he stands up to speak. O how precious would the word of God be to the pious hearer, if it was always delivered with the proper spirit! How much more would preaching attract the attention of the careless, and how much deeper would be the impression on their minds, if the dispenser of the word not only delivered the truth, but poured forth with it a flood of pious affection. The low state of piety in Ministers is the chief reason of the want of success in preaching. It is true, God must give the increase; but when he gives it, he prepares suitable means before hand. It is not analogous to his method of dispensing divine influences, that the cold and formal preacher should be made the instrument of much good. It is found, in experience, that God blesses most the labours of those whose hearts are most sincerely and deeply engaged in their work. Men of eminent abilities without lively piety, make poor and dry preachers. They may compose rhetorical discourses,

and deliver them eloquently, but the spirit is wanting; and while the taste of the refined may be gratified, and many may admire the ingenuity of the preacher, the pious are not fed, and the blessing of God does not commonly accompany such preaching. That man who does not seriously aim at the conversion of sinners, is not likely to be the instrument of this great change. This leads me to observe,

III. In the third place, that eminent piety will make you mighty in prayer, and this will give success to all your other labours. The most accomplished Minister is entirely dependent on God for every degree of success in his ministry. Even the apostles could not convert a single soul by all their miraculous gifts, and by all their inspiration; by all their fervent zeal and indefatigable labours. This heavenly birth is not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. "Paul may plant, and Apollos water, but God giveth the increase; so then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase." Since, then, you are entirely dependent on the grace of God for your success in your work, is it not exceedingly important, that you should have skill and energy in using the instrument by which divine influences may be brought down upon your ministrations? And you need not be informed, that the prayer of faith is the instrument by which the kingdom of heaven may be, as it were, invaded, and taken by violence. God cannot resist (I speak it with reverence,) the force of a

holy, believing, untiring importunity, which resolves to give him no rest, until he grants the blessing. Why are the labours of Ministers so frequently barren of fruit? Why are they still destined to cry, "Who hath believed our report?" The fault is not principally in the preaching: this is sound, and evangelical; but probably the great deficiency lies in the feebleness of our prayers. God is waiting to be gracious; but he will be inquired of by the house of Israel for these things, that he may do it for them. If the good seed of the word were soaked in prayer before it is dispensed, and then watered with prayer after it is sown, it would oftener be seen to spring up and bring forth abundant fruit. The man of God must be a man of prayer—he must be instant, unceasing, and fervent in prayer; and then he will be able to open heaven, and call down showers of divine influences upon his other labours. But how otherwise can this grace and gift of prayer be obtained but by attaining to eminence in piety? On this subject Christ himself, who is the fountain of life, and himself the giver of all spiritual blessings, has set us a perfect example that we should follow his steps. At this day, especially, we need men, not only mighty in the Scriptures, but mighty in prayer. In conducting the public prayers of the congregation, how much the comfort and edification of the pious depends on the spirit of him who is their mouth to speak unto God, must be obvious to all. Our mode of offering up our prayers without a pre-conceived form, can commend itself to enlightened and spiritual men, only when our Ministers shall possess the

true spirit of prayer, and shall pray with the spirit and with the understanding. Cultivate piety, then, in all its parts, for prayer is nothing else but the natural language of the pious heart; it is the breathing of the new man; or rather the inexpressible groaning and sighing of a soul sick of sin, and panting for deliverance. O that young men who seek to be useful in the ministry, would spend more time in communion with God in prayer, than they commonly do! To be eminent in piety and mighty in prayer, are identical.

IV. The example and daily walk of a pastor is of the utmost importance to his usefulness among his people. The sentiments of a large majority of the people, respecting the nature of piety and the correct standard of life, will be taken rather from the example than the discourses of their pastor. A holy life preaches to the consciences of men as nothing else does; and it gives weight and influence to every word which he speaks; whereas, if a Minister's conduct be not exemplary, he may speak with the eloquence of men and angels, and it will be disregarded. The wickedest men in society feel the force of a consistent and holy life. They may hate the man because he reproveth their sins; but in their inmost souls they fear and respect him; and are more persuaded of the reality of true religion by one such example, than by a thousand arguments. The pious are continually edified and comforted by seeing the godly walk of their spiritual guide. As he appears to follow Christ, so they will endeavour to follow him. They see

by his conduct what manner of persons Christians ought to be; for duty is much more evident when it is distinctly drawn out and exhibited in the life, than when inculcated in words. Now it may be laid down as a maxim, that a man's life will be as is his inward piety. No man ever did lead a holy life who had no experience of the power of true godliness. And that pastor who possesses eminent piety, is the only one whose example will produce much effect on the minds of men. Others may make an external show of zeal, and may abound in religious duties, but the sweet savour of piety will be wanting, and the uniform consistency of the mature Christian will not be found, when their whole conduct is scrutinized. It ought also to be kept in mind, that no man can have any security that he will not fall into disgraceful sins, but by aiming at a high standard of piety. The power of temptation is too great to be resisted by a weak and irregular faith; and no men are exposed to more dangerous temptations than are some Ministers of the Gospel. And, alas! many stand as beacons to warn those who come after them of the dangerous rocks and quicksands which beset the course of the Minister of the Gospel. Some who went out of port with swelling sails and fearless confidence, are seen, after being tossed and driven with a succession of fierce tempests, reduced almost to the condition of a wreck. "Let him that standeth take heed lest he fall." But when gross misconduct is avoided, there may be so much appearance of vanity, of levity.

of indolence, of peevishness, of worldly mindedness, or of unsteadiness in principle and practice, that no one is edified by the example and conversation of their pastor. While the devoutly pious weep in secret over his foibles and deficiencies, the wicked secretly triumph and take confidence, because they see so little in the man of God which distinguishes him from themselves. The example of the pastor, instead of elevating the standard of piety among the people, is continually pleaded by professors and others as sanctioning their self-indulgent and careless manner of living. Be persuaded, my young friends, to "let your light so shine before men, that they seeing your good works may glorify your father who is in heaven." "Be an example of believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity." "Follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness." Nothing upon earth is so lovely as the mild but steady light of a holy life. And to exhibit such a life, you must become eminent in piety.

V. Another consideration, which will confirm what has been said respecting the importance of eminent piety to Ministers is, that without this no man can be qualified to solve cases of conscience, and to direct the perplexed and troubled spirit in the way of peace. One great end of the ministry is to bind up the broken-hearted, and to comfort mourners in Zion; but how can that shepherd heal the diseased of the flock, and guide the weak and ignorant, who is but little experienced in the divine life? 'The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him.' The

man who knows not the conflicts of the Christian life, the buffetings of temptation, and the succours of grace, cannot be a skilful spiritual guide. Many young preachers, who may attract much admiration by their pulpit performances, are, nevertheless, poorly qualified to deal with diseased consciences, or to guide those Christians who have made great advances in the divine life. And no human learning can fit a preacher for this part of his work; he must be taught of God; and should seek to know the hidden life of communion with God, by a rich and growing experience.

VI. Finally. Uniform and exalted piety is the only thing which can render your work delightful. To such as do not live habitually under a sense of divine truth, the duties of the ministry must be exceedingly irksome, and almost intolerable. To a heart unreconciled to God, and destitute of all relish for divine things, what enjoyment can there be in prayer, in preaching, and catechising, and attending on the beds of the sick and the houses of poverty and mourning. It is, indeed, strange, that such men should ever think of the ministry of the Gospel, as a profession for life. But ambition and vain glory may find gratification in the opportunity which the pulpit affords for the display of learning, ingenuity, and eloquence, and in the respect and sanctity which, in the view of many, is attached to the sacred office; but without lively piety, there can be no delight in the more private and self-denying duties of the pastoral care. It is love which makes every burden light, and every yoke

easy. To one who loves the Lord Jesus Christ supremely, no work can be more pleasant than the feeding of his sheep and lambs. The good pastor loves the sheep for the sake of their Owner, the great and good Shepherd, who laid down his life for them. For his sake, labour, and toil, and sorrow, and persecution are not only borne with patience, but welcomed and rejoiced in.

Animated by this living principle of love to the Lord Jesus Christ, the pious Missionary shuts his eyes on all that the world esteems good and great, and embraces a life of poverty, toil, and suffering, in far distant lands. The endearments of home, and relatives, and country, he relinquishes, and becomes, for life, a voluntary exile. To the men of the world, his conduct appears wrapt in mystery. They cannot understand the nature of his feelings, and call them by the opprobrious name of enthusiasm. To them it seems to be an unnatural sacrifice of happiness; for they cannot imagine, that he has any compensation for his losses. But the truth is, no men on earth enjoy more pure happiness than devoted Missionaries. They do actually receive a hundred fold for all the sacrifices which they have made. I speak of such as are actuated by deep and ardent feelings of piety; for, strange as it may seem, it is possible for men to become not only Missionaries, but martyrs, and yet be utterly destitute of true religion. But such instances, it may be presumed, are rare. That which moves, supports, animates, and consoles the laborious preacher among the Heathen, is the warm and steady glow of love to the Redeemer, and to the souls of men. The more a Christian

is cast upon religion alone for his happiness, the more does he enjoy its pleasures. For this reason, the pious Missionary, although surrounded with dangers and difficulties, and often almost overwhelmed with sorrow and discouragement, upon the whole, is among the happiest of mortals; and he would be unwilling to exchange his condition for one of the greatest affluence and ease.

It was nothing but the constant exercise of eminent piety which animated the apostles and primitive Christians with such an inextinguishable ardour; and which caused them to rejoice even in reproaches and persecutions. There was no miracle necessary to enable the martyrs to rejoice at the stake, and even in the flames; the shedding abroad of the love of God in their hearts was sufficient to produce all the effects which were witnessed; and the same would now result from the same cause.

Be assured, my dear young friends, that without genuine piety, the office of the holy Ministry will not be tolerable, unless the conscience be seared as with a hot iron; and without eminent piety, your work will not be pleasant; but if your hearts are deeply affected with the truths which you profess to love, and which you expect to preach, nothing will be able to prevent or materially to disturb your peace of mind. This is a joy which is full, and which no man taketh away from you. If, therefore, you wish for a happy life and a peaceful end, cultivate piety and daily study to become eminent in every branch of the Christian character. Remember, too, that you must soon ap-

pear before the judgment seat of Christ to render an account of your stewardship. When that solemn hour shall have come, the advantages of eminent piety will be most conspicuous. The difference between the faithful and diligent, and the wicked and slothful servant will be manifest to all; the one will be for ever comforted, and the other tormented. To the one, the Lord will say, "Well done good and faithful servant enter into the joy of thy Lord;" to the other, "Depart from me, I never knew you." Through eternity shall the pious and devoted Minister rejoice in the presence of God, with those redeemed spirits, whom he has been the instrument of rescuing from hell and conducting to heaven. But who can describe the anguish and the wailings of unfaithful Ministers, when, with Judas, they lift up their eyes in the deepest regions of despair. "Hell," said one of the fathers, "is paved with the skulls of ungodly Ministers." O, then, be in earnest about your work. Let divine love glow in your own bosom. Regard not the world nor the things in the world. Be instant in season and out of season. Live near to God, and keep up a lively sense of divine things on your minds. Exert every faculty, and employ every talent and opportunity in promoting the glory of God and the salvation of men. Be faithful unto death, and ye shall receive the crown of life.







